

JUSTICE SECTOR CONSTELLATION
ENOUGH FOR ALL, CALGARY'S POVERTY REDUCTION INITIATIVE
SYNOPSIS UPDATE
DECEMBER 5, 2016

The original mandate of the Justice Sector Constellation was to make recommendations to the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative Secretariat on a poverty-reduction strategy in the context of the legal system. These recommendations are set out in the Constellation's report dated March 19, 2013, which is entitled "Intervening at the Intersection of Poverty and the Legal System" (see at http://enoughforall.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/JSC_FinalReport_2013.pdf).

Over 90 percent of the recommendations developed by the Constellation had previously been made, directly or indirectly, in other reports regarding the legal system and the justice sector. In light of that, the members of the Constellation agreed to continue to work together on implementing the Constellation's recommendations, despite having completed their original mandate. Since April 2013, the Constellation has been actively working on implementing a number of its recommendations. The Constellation's main focus is currently on the following projects:

1. **By-laws Project:** One of the issues identified by the Constellation is that the impact of receiving a fine for by-law and other infractions is more significant for those living in poverty. In light of this, the Constellation recommends that the policy underlying infractions that have a disproportionate impact on those with low income be reconsidered. Legal analysis has been conducted and quantitative and qualitative data is being gathered, to provide an evidentiary and analytical basis for such a reconsideration. The Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre is conducting the legal analysis for the project. The Alberta Human Rights Commission has provided funding for the social science aspect of the project. Key stakeholders in by-law enforcement have expressed their interest in and offered support for the project.
2. **Service Provider Capacity Building Project:** Service providers and intermediaries (e.g., community and faith community workers and volunteers) outside of the justice sector may not recognize that their clients have legal issues or may not know where to refer clients who have such issues. This project seeks to establish linkages with and facilitate cross-referrals between these service providers and intermediaries on the one hand, and justice sector resources and services on the other hand. Funding was obtained to develop and pilot training to increase awareness of potential legal issues as part of client needs and increase awareness of and referral to appropriate justice sector services and resources. Training pilots were conducted in fall 2015, and the training was well-received. The training has been evaluated, and the Constellation has conducted a survey to provide baseline data to evaluate the effects of the training over time. The survey results have also been analyzed to identify areas in which the training is most needed, as well as sectors in which cross-referrals are lacking. Some funding has been obtained and additional funding is being sought to provide the training broadly to service providers and intermediaries outside of the justice sector, as well as some within the justice sector.
3. **Database Project:** Appropriate and timely access to justice sector services requires knowledge of what services are available. The goal of this project is to develop a current, comprehensive database of justice sector service providers and justice sector services, available to both the public and other service providers. After reviewing three existing databases and consulting with relevant stakeholders, the Constellation recommended integrating two of the databases into the InformAlberta database. Stakeholder agreement for the integration was obtained, and the integration work is underway. In addition, the Constellation plans to develop a directory of justice sector services for the websites

using the InformAlberta database, to make it easier for the public, service providers and intermediaries to find relevant justice sector services.

4. **Legal Advice versus Legal Information Project:** Those in the justice sector authorized to provide legal information may err on the side of not providing such information for fear of providing legal advice, which they are not authorized to give. This project seeks to educate these justice sector service providers on the difference between legal advice and legal information, so as to encourage them to provide as much legal information as possible. Resource materials have been developed, and the first presentation was made in October 2015.
5. **Collaboration with Educators Project:** The goal of this project is greater understanding within the justice sector regarding vulnerability to legal issues, the interaction between poverty and the legal system, and the need for lawyers and other legal professionals in poverty law. To that end, presentations have been made to educational institutions which provide training for justice sector service providers (e.g., lawyers, police officers, and corrections and probation workers). Specifically, the Constellation has advocated to have issues regarding the legal system and poverty included in materials for existing courses, and for the development of a credit and/or continuing education course on poverty and the law.
6. **Courthouse Greeters and Mapping Project:** The Constellation conducted a needs assessment at the Calgary Courts Centre regarding how best to assist people coming into the courthouse to get them to their court or service and respond to their questions. Recommendations regarding signage, mapping and training of service personnel were made. Some of the recommendations have been implemented, and implementation of the other recommendations is underway.

As the result of a recent Visioning Session, the Constellation has identified potential projects, which are being examined to determine the role the Constellation could play to advance them. These include reducing barriers to getting to court by addressing child-minding issues; support for the development of community courts; educating lawyers regarding poverty law; addressing issues that arise for those released from custody; and a research project regarding coordination of justice-sector services.